

GUIDE POSTS  
TO  
LIFE WORK

WALLACE B. FLEMING



# GUIDE POSTS TO LIFE WORK

*Talks with Young People  
on  
Choosing Vocations*

By  
WALLACE B. FLEMING



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TO THE EPWORTH LEAGUE HOSTS, WHO  
THROUGH THEIR SUMMER INSTITUTES ARE  
RAISING UP A WORTHY CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP  
FOR THE FUTURE, THIS SERIES OF STUDIES IS  
DEDICATED BECAUSE IT HAS GROWN OUT OF  
INSPIRING FELLOWSHIP WITH THEM.



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## PREFACE

LITTLE BOOK, you are to go forth to talk with young people about their life work. Do not mind it if older folks pay slight attention to you; your mission is to young men and young women. It may be that you can help some of them to find themselves.

You will whisper to them that there is a providential care that extends to the details of their lives; that the "steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord"; that, as to life work, God has his first choice for every one of them, and you will try to help them find that choice.

You are such a little book and there are so many big questions they will ask you that you cannot answer. But do not be discouraged; if you were bigger, they would not read you at all, for there are many things claiming their attention. Small as you are, some will not have the patience to hear your whole story.

You know that there are great numbers of splendid young folk who need life work guidance, and that the problem of finding their proper places in this fast-moving new age is difficult for them. Some day they will want to say "Father, I have finished the work that thou gavest me to do." Can you help them to find that work?

Little friend, when I think of the greatness of the task you are to attempt, misgivings mingle with my hopes for you. But you must make the adventure. Help the young people if you can.

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## CHAPTER I

### MOTIVES IN VOCATIONAL CHOICE

AN essential in finding the right vocation is that one be impelled by right motives. Low motives will not lead to high careers of usefulness. Choices made without consideration of the motives back of them are not intelligent choices. A decision as to life work ought to be preceded by a careful consideration of the motives that enter into such decisions.

Some seem to allow the matter to settle itself without making any definite decision regarding it. One man became a grocer, not because he was especially fitted for that kind of work, or because there was special need for grocers in his community, or because he believed that he could serve his fellow men best in such work. He may never have given serious thought to the question as to what vocation he ought to follow. He is a grocer merely because the first job he got after leaving school was in a grocery store.

Another man is a carpenter without having planned to become a carpenter at all. In fact, he may never have tried to determine what he ought to become. He did a little work for a certain boss carpenter and liked him, and so he kept on at the work. And the years passed

and now he is a carpenter. It may be that he is only a second-rate carpenter, when he could have been a first-rate banker or physician or merchant. He did not try to determine what work he could do best or what was most needed. He merely drifted into his life work. Often young people are too much influenced by the decisions of their fellows. In a certain high-school class ten of the twelve young men who graduated decided to take up engineering. How could ten out of twelve come to the same choice as to life work? It is probable that one or two strong characters in the class decided for themselves and that the others simply followed.

There are many who take the plan of following the life work of their fathers. There is something to be said for this plan. If a father has had great success, there may rightfully be an assumption that a fitness for such work will be inherited by his sons. At least they will be in a position to gather wisdom out of his experiences. It is said that among the ancient Egyptians the son was required to learn the trade of his father, and that by this plan artisans of great skill were developed.

The trouble with this plan is that it does not leave room for Christian initiative; it does not take into account the variety of abilities with which God endows men. It may be real

ground for consideration in making a life-plan but it alone is ground entirely too small to serve as a base for so large a decision.

Among others of ancient time the father chose an occupation for his son. At the time of Christ every Jewish parent was required to teach his son some useful trade. Jesus was a carpenter. Paul was a tent-maker. And although the son could change his occupation, he usually did not do so.

In modern times this method has been tried. But in these days of universal education and startlingly rapid change—in these days of democracy and of individual responsibility—the present cannot be ruled by the past. The generation coming in cannot accept choices for it made by the generation passing out. In this important matter of life work each must work out his own salvation.

Some may decide their life work on the basis of what is easy for them. A certain kind of work looks like a “snap.” It will require the minimum of real toil, and the toil it does require will be pleasurable.

Now, the fact that a particular line of work is agreeable and easy of accomplishment may indicate special abilities for just such work. Men can usually accomplish most when their work is congenial. These facts are worthy of consideration. But the young man who chooses a certain life work because it seems

to him to offer a path of roses that have no thorns is always doomed to disappointment and to a wasted life.

In considering so great a matter young people sometimes get a totally wrong result because they give secondary considerations a deciding prominence. Decisions usually grow out of the combination of several motives. Some motives of which men are unconscious affect their decisions and their actions. It is not enough that decisions be based on proper motives; the motives impelling to decision ought to be permitted to exert an influence proportioned to their relative importance.

Many young people determine their life work on the basis of prospective financial returns. Where can most money be made? Will this vocation lead to prosperity and wealth? When it is remembered what money can do, its protection to loved ones, the conveniences and comforts it supplies, how it transmutes life into a thousand forms of helpfulness, enabling one man to exchange the toil by which he has earned it into missionary work in some far-off land, enabling another to transmute his industry into perpetual enrichment for young life by gifts to education, enabling another to transform his toil into deeds of mercy by his gifts to charities—when the magic of money is remembered, it will readily be granted that it is entirely proper for a young person to



consider the financial returns when weighing the matter of life work. And yet this motive ought not to be permitted to become a ruling motive. It is not of first importance. Some who have blessed the world most have had little of its wealth.

Occasionally life work decisions rest upon an eagerness for human praise. A certain vocation is chosen because of the honors to which it may lead.

Eagerness for commendation is natural, and it is proper if properly directed. When misdirected or given too great a place, it leads men to seek human praise at almost any price. When kept in its proper place, it leads men to desire to be worthy of praise more than to receive praise, and to merit good will more than to secure it.

As a servant to higher motives, the craving for honor is a great help; but as a master motive it is ruinous.

The same may be said of a craving for power. If power be desired for noble ends, the struggle for power ennobles the man and makes his life a blessing whether he attains the kind of power desired or not. But eagerness for power in order that one may gratify his own ambition or impose his own will upon others is a motive that is wholly unworthy.

In forming a life work decision we may justly count this as another motive that is a

good servant of higher motives but a bad master.

The Lord of Life has shown that life's supreme motive is service. When the mother of James and John desired that her sons might have highest places of honor, and the other disciples became indignant, Jesus said, "Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Not so shall it be among you: but whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister: and whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20. 25-28).

The great questions for every man are: "How can I do the most good in the world? How can I render the largest service? How can I make my life count to the utmost in the things that are noble?" He whose decision as to life work is dominated by such considerations has accepted Christ's view of human responsibility and is on the way to learn God's will for his life.

*Has God a plan for each life?* The question as to whether God has a plan for each life has been much debated. There would seem to be indications that he has a plan at least for some lives. We read, "The steps of

a good man are ordered by the Lord" (Psalm 37.23). The Saviour's statement of the all-inclusive care of the heavenly Father, without whom not even a sparrow falls to the ground, would seem to warrant the belief that he is so deeply concerned as to be willing to direct. Many passages of the Holy Writ confirm this view.

Very many good men believe that they see in their own lives evidences of providential guidance. The great forward movements of the kingdom of God have been led by men who were inspired with the belief that they were under divine leadership.

The hymns and prayers of Christendom are full of trust in providential care. It is difficult to see how anyone can believe in God as revealed by Christ and yet think of him as unconcerned about that which concerns his children so much.

Indeed, much of life rests in this belief. God says, "This is the way, walk ye in it" (Isaiah 30.21); and he says it as truly to-day as in the days of old. We read that Abram went forth not knowing whither he was going, but conscious of the leadership of God, and there are many who believe that experience to be typical. They believe that they themselves just as really have been providentially led forth by new and unknown ways.

*Can man make God take second choice?* If God has a plan for each life, and one chooses to follow some other path, does God readjust his plans?

In Jeremiah 18.1 to 6, it is written: "The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought his work on the wheels. And when the vessel that he made of the clay was marred in the hand of the potter, he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, O, house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel."

God is just as solicitous for people to-day. He always does the best for us that we will let him do.

In an Eastern city a pastor called at the home of an official member. In the course of their conversation the church officer said: "I want to tell you the tragedy of my own life. When I was a young man I saw clearly what God wanted me to do, but I put off preparation for the task from time to time until I finally awoke to the fact that it was too late, and that I could never do the work to which God



had called me. He has forgiven me, and men say that I am successful as a business man, and that my life is useful; but to me there is the great and constant regret that I have compelled God to take second choice in my life. I did not let him have first choice."

It is of the utmost importance that a person find the work that the Father has given him to do. Many a man who is free from the danger of yielding to that which is obviously evil is still in danger of the tragedy of following the second best. One of our poets has said:

"God has his best things for the few  
Who dare to stand the test;  
He has his second best for those  
Who will not have his best."\*

*Can one find God's plan?* It is clear that God does not give to us detailed outlines of what our lives are to be. He does not supply any blue prints which, when once accepted, may be followed without further exercise of thought. Such a method of dealing would take away from life its thousand joyous surprises. We must always walk by faith and not by sight. Doubtless this is best.

It is true that God's call to some men seems to have been a necessity laid upon them. Paul said, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel."

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\*Quoted from *Poems with Power to Strengthen the Soul*—Mudge; published by the Methodist Book Concern.

His experience on the Damascus road was certainly unusual. No one would argue it as God's ordinary way of making his purpose known.

It is just as certain that God does not usually call men to any kind of life work by strange ecstatic experiences in which they are relieved of the necessity for sober, earnest thought. That was not his method even in the experiences of Paul. Our choices would not be our own if such were God's plan. So then it is necessary for us to use all the mental ability that God has given us. We must seek every known help. Sound sense is not to be replaced by anything else. Our decisions will have to be our own.

Nevertheless, this book is written in the confidence that God has a plan for each life, and that there is a way to find it.

## CHAPTER II

### LIFE'S MOST IMPORTANT OCCUPATION FOR YOU

*“Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it”* (John 2.5). “Am I willing to seek God’s plan for my life with the fixed determination to do his will whatever it may be?” Unless you are willing to ask yourself this question and settle it definitely, it is quite useless to seek God’s plan at all. You may *choose* for yourself; but you can never have the great joy of finding God’s purpose and choosing it.

Here as elsewhere in spiritual things, knowledge comes through a spirit of obedience. Jesus said, “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine” (John 7.17). Disobedience is a source of spiritual blindness. The spirit of obedience is essential in seeking God’s plan.

The spirit of obedience is also essential for the growth and for the increasing joy that God means life should have. “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Proverbs 4.18). Life as God intends it is a path of increasing joy and development and useful-

ness; but the gateway to that path is obedience.

“He that doeth the will of heaven  
To him shall knowledge and sight be given.”

*Secular tasks may be sacred.* Young people sometimes are influenced by the old distinctions of secular and sacred callings. Some think of God as interested in the life work of only those whom he calls for what people sometimes speak of as sacred callings. Such a view narrows the range of honorable and useful pursuits open to consideration when life investment is being considered. Such a view does injustice to many who are faithfully serving God in ministering to man's material needs.

To every man his work. God needs a great variety of workers in the world. His children must be fed. They must be clothed and housed and protected and developed and cared for in a thousand ways. He needs workers for all of these things. Every work that adds to the welfare and happiness of men must be regarded by the heavenly Father as sacred work.

It must not be supposed that all young people who definitely seek the will of God for their life work will be led into those lines of work which are sometimes spoken of as “sacred callings.” Men are learning that God calls some to be farmers and others to be bankers

and others to be carpenters, and so forth, and that the man who has found the work that God would have him do has found a sacred work.

Any life work is sacred if it is God's will for the man engaged in it.

"No service in itself is small;  
None great though earth it fill.  
But that is small that seeks its own;  
That great that seeks God's will."\*

The man who is called of God to be a carpenter should look upon his work as sacred. He should put his best into his work. He is erecting shelter for God's children. He belongs to the craft of the Carpenter of Nazareth.

The farmer who *ought* to be a farmer is God's farmer. He co-operates with God in producing the food for the world. Let him hold his head up and regard his calling as a holy calling, for so it is.

A man is called of God to be a doctor. Day after day he passes among the people defending them from disease, preventing its spread, or promoting health so vigorous as to be able to resist it. At the home of some child that is desperately ill the good doctor spends the long hours of the night fighting with death for the possession of the little life. Death reaches

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\*Quoted from *Poems with Power to Strengthen the Soul*—Mudge; published by the Methodist Book Concern.



out to seize the child; the doctor smites death again and again with the sword of his skill. At length death retreats, the fever breaks, the child is safe. Is not the work of such a doctor a sacred calling?

God needs shoemakers; and when he calls a man to be a shoemaker the man ought to put character into his toil. He ought to say: "Mine is a sacred work; I protect people's health. The little girl whose shoes I am mending must not get wet feet and become ill because of carelessness on my part. Mine is a sacred work, for God needs it done for his children. It is part of his plan."

God needs garbage men. Some day people will become wise enough to see that this is true. The man who is led of God to such toil should know that his work is sacred. He is preventing pestilence in our cities. Without his work life in our cities and towns would be almost impossible. Is it not a sacred work to save health and life?

But it ought to be kept in mind that God does not choose sledge-hammers for driving carpet tacks. If your abilities are suited only to extremely modest tasks, God will assign you to such tasks and you will have a right to consider your work sacred and to follow it with a singing heart. But if you have abilities that are suited to larger and more difficult tasks, God will not call you to the simpler

work. It cannot be your work. You will remember that God gave to Abraham Lincoln abilities for world statesmanship, and that Lincoln was a failure as a country storekeeper.

In recent times commercial expansion has been emphasizing the world's need of Christian leadership in finance and industry. The growth of vast manufacturing enterprises has caused a concentration of power in the hands of a limited number of leaders and the welfare of the masses depends upon them in large measure.

The development of natural resources and the growth of manufacturing has been accompanied by a marvelous expansion of trade. Domestic commerce now moves in volumes unheard of until recent times. Foreign commerce is increasing with equally astonishing growth.

These and other causes are resulting in developments in finance of vast and ever-increasing proportions. The kings of the modern world do not sit on tinseled thrones as in the days of old; they sit behind mahogany desks in vast office buildings and direct the affairs of the kingdoms of industry and commerce and finance.

If ever these kingdoms become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ, it will be because a leadership has arisen that is wise enough to think in terms of the world's wel-

fare, and good enough to exemplify the Christ spirit. And if God calls men to big business leadership, and they face their tasks in the Christ spirit, who will say that theirs is not a sacred calling?

We may be sure that the work God wants us to do will mature and develop us. It will count in our making for eternity. And he knows where our life can best mature; we do not. If we had not seen the thing work out, who would have chosen the muck and the slime as the best place for the growing of beautiful white pond lilies?

“But my work is irksome and grinding,” one says. “How does this contribute to the perfecting of my life?” It may be that we cannot know; but the Father knows.

Hear the complaint of the diamond on the wheels of the jewel-cutter. “This process cuts and grinds and hurts. It is wearing me away. It is so painful. Why could I not be left alone? Why should I be put upon the wheels? What has the jewel-cutter against me that he should subject me to all this?” Be still, little diamond; be submissive to keenest discipline, even to the grinding of the wheels. The jewel-cutter is preparing you for a place in the diadem of a king.

You must not think of labor as a curse. Sorrow and toil were God’s earliest provision



for the spiritual recovery and development of man.

Again, if you will let Christ direct you in your life work, your calling will be sacred because you will have Christ's presence with you in it.

Some years ago Professors Grenfell and Hunt unearthed important ancient papyri at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt. Among these ancient fragments there was one of priceless value. It contained a number of lost sayings of Jesus. One of these sayings contains the thought now before us. It reads, "Jesus saith, Lift the stone and thou shalt find me; cleave the wood and there am I." The thought is that wherever men are engaged in honest toil, Christ is not far away.

Henry Van Dyke has taken this passage as a basis for his charming little book entitled *The Toiling of Felix*. It traces the recovery of a soul by the discipline of toil. With the permission of the author we quote the summing up of its message.

"THE GOSPEL OF LABOR"\*

"But I think the King of that country comes out  
from his tireless host;  
And walks in this world of the weary, as if he loved  
it the most;  
For here in the dusty confusion, with eyes that  
are heavy and dim.  
He meets again the laboring men who are looking  
and longing for him.

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\*Copyrighted by Charles Scribner's Sons.

“He cancels the curse of Eden, and brings them a blessing instead;  
Blessed are they that labor, for Jesus partakes of their bread.  
He puts his hand to their burdens, he enters their homes at night;  
Who does his best shall have as a guest the Master of life and of light.

“And courage will come with his presence, and patience return at his touch,  
And manifold sins be forgiven to those who love him much;  
And the cries of envy and anger will change to the songs of cheer,  
For the toiling age will forget its rage when the Prince of Peace draws near.

“This is the gospel of labor—ring it ye bells of the kirk—  
The Lord of Love came down from above, to live with the men who work.  
This is the rose that he planted, here in the thorn-cursed soil—  
Heaven is blest with perfect rest, but the blessing of earth is toil.”

—*Henry Van Dyke.*

We have seen that so-called secular vocations have their glory, and that one should hold sacred the work to which God assigns him whatever others may think of that work. It will be noted that the so-called secular vocations afford opportunity to minister mainly to physical needs. Food, clothing, shelter, transportation, medical care—these and a thousand other ministries to human need are first of all ministries to man's physical need.

But there is a peculiar glory in those vocations that minister not to men's bodies but to their souls. Such vocations serve the immortal in man. They bring men into conscious fellowship with God. They call forth the noblest and highest powers for those who follow them and directly affect the characters and destinies of men.

The call to such service does not always come in the same way. God speaks "in divers manners" to those whom he calls.

Isaiah volunteered. He was in the temple worshiping when he got a new vision of God's greatness and glory. He got a conception of God's holiness as such that the seraphim would veil their faces before him as they cried, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

In the presence of the holy God he saw his own spiritual need and that of his people. And then he realized that God could care for human sin and need, and God could cleanse away his sin. Then he heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And Isaiah answered, "Here am I; send me."

Saint Paul was almost thrust into the service. On the Damascus road as he meditated truth broke on him in a startling vision. He beheld the crucified Jesus as the Lord of all. He awoke to a personal responsibility to

Christ, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" "Arise and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do."

With most men the call comes in a conviction to duty. One man considers how his life can accomplish most good, and there comes to him a persuasion that he ought to devote himself to the ministry; another meditates on the paths of spiritual darkness that covers the heathen nations. He is moved by the spirit of the heroic Christ, and feels that it is his duty to go as a missionary; and thus God has called him.

We cannot say that God never calls man by strange, ecstatic experiences in which they are directly impressed by his will. God speaks to men in many ways. But we can say that the call of God usually comes to men in an assurance of duty to be done. God expects men to exercise all of their mental abilities in determining what their work should be. His spirit ordinarily operates through man's mental processes. Nothing could be more misleading or harmful than the idea that no man ought to enter a religious vocation unless compelled by God to do so. Usually men whose ministry bears the marks of divine approval have entered their sacred calling with great joy when they realized what God wanted them to do.

The call to life service usually involves a call to prepare for that service. If there is no life work more important or with greater issues involved, then the preparation for the ministry ought to be as thorough and careful as for any other vocation among men.

A doctor had just performed the delicate operation of removing a cataract from the eye of a patient. A minister said, "But your responsibility is so great; the slightest mistake and you have blinded an eye." The doctor replied, "But what about your responsibility? May not a mistake on your part work eternal injury?"

The doctor who prepares properly to-day must complete his four years in college and four years of medical study in addition. And yet some men would be willing to enter the ministry without so much as a high-school education.

The difficulties in the way of securing proper training are usually much smaller than they first appear. Bunyan's Pilgrim saw lions in the way; but when he went forward he found them chained. If he had stopped where he was when he first saw the lions, he would never have known that they were chained. The young person who thinks he sees impassable difficulties in the way of an adequate preparation for life work usually sees difficulties some



distance in advance. Ordinarily, if he will go forward, the way will open.

Then consider the joy of such a life work, the satisfaction in helping to develop the noblest and the holiest in man.

People are sometimes inclined to pity the missionaries because they leave home and friends and native land, and go far across the sea to live amid conditions of ignorance or superstition or filth or squalor. But who ever heard of a missionary who regretted that he had undertaken such work? They have a holy joy that others have not known.

The deaconess in a slum section of an Eastern city lives for the foreign children and street waifs. She instructs them and teaches them, and lives her beautiful life before them. Men say: "Is it safe to allow this woman to go unattended into this section where there is so rough a class of people? Will not some harm come to her?" But those who know reply that the rough and uncouth characters of that section in their awkward efforts to express their appreciation of the woman of Christ call her the "angel with the white jaw-strings," and her face shines as the face of an angel when the street waifs run to meet her at her coming.

Do not pity her: she has a joy never known to those who have not poured out their lives

to help the helpless and to rescue the fallen and to bring the lost back to God.

A preacher visited an old lady who had been living as a recluse. She had not left her home for years. The preachers had tried to call at other times but were not admitted. This time she was ill and the preacher was admitted. In the conversation he said: "I have an old book here that has some strange things in it. Maybe you could explain some of them. Here it reads, 'Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me.' "

"I know," said the old lady, "it is Jesus talking. I used to read that when I was a little girl."

The preacher said, "It sounds mighty good, for it says 'In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you.' It must have been great for those people. Wouldn't it be good if there were only some way for us to get in on it?"

She said, "It is for us. It is not like Jesus to have good things for only a few and nobody else have a chance. I know, for I remember of studying about him at Sunday school when I was a little girl sixty years ago."

The preacher said, "How can we get counted in?"

And the queer old lady whose soul had been starved said, "He will count us in if we ask

him. I know now. Now I remember; all we need to do is to pray."

Then the preacher prayed, and the old lady found the joy of knowing that she was counted in on the good promises of Christ. And when she went to God it was found that she had left a bequest for the Sunday school where as a little child she had learned of Jesus.

Do you know of any holier joy than comes to such a preacher? Of course he gets tired when he sits all night at the side of some sick person; but think of the joy of helping one who is nearing the end of the journey to clasp the pierced hand of the Good Shepherd and go forth into the valley of death fearing no evil. It is not easy to go into the house of sorrow to carry comfort. And yet to enable those in trouble and sorrow to know that underneath them are the everlasting arms is holy joy.

Think of the joy of proclaiming the glorious gospel of the Son of God and of seeing it grip the lives of men to transform them.

In the photographer's studio you may enter the dark room and watch the work. The photographer takes the print from the plate and slips it into the developing solution. After a time you see it beginning to change. He dips it again and you see human features begin-



ning to appear. You watch the process with strange joy, for now out of what was dark you see the face of a friend appearing ever plainer until it is a perfect image.

The preacher's work is like that. He treats the souls of his hearers with spiritual truth until that which is dark and obscure dissolves and the image of God grows clearer and clearer. Could any work bring holier joy?

Then consider the permanence of the work. Men aspire to accomplish imperishable things. The pyramids of Egypt were probably an effort to defy the ravages of time. Great monuments and triumphal arches are erected that the memory of great deeds may be perpetuated. Men are not willing to pass through life without accomplishing some enduring work. But those who work in bronze or marble cannot conquer time. Only that which affects the soul reaches eternity.

Thorwaldsen stood before a block of marble, and saw in it what no other man had ever seen; and then he began to chip away that which obstructed what he had seen. At last with infinite care the work was done; the vision in marble stood before him. Then he wondered if he had seen aright and resolved to make a test. His statue was carefully covered. He brought his little daughter into the studio and in her presence unveiled his work. Her eyes sparkled with admiration. She exclaimed, "It

looks so wondrously like our Saviour." Then the great artist was satisfied. He had produced one of the world's masterpieces. That is the story of Thorwaldsen's statue of Christ.

Happy the minister who sees the Christ hidden behind human imperfections and who is able with infinite patience and care to bring forth, not a stone image, but a living likeness. He has the joy of knowing that he has enriched the world. He has made effective that for which Christ died. Then, while the work wrought by other men in stone or bronze will yield to time's influences of destruction, his will have a permanence as enduring as the immortal souls of men.

"He built a house, Time laid it in the dust;  
He wrote a book, its title now forgot;  
He ruled a city, but his name is not  
On any table graven or where rust  
Can gather from disuse, or marble bust.

"He took a child from out a wretched cot;  
Who on the State dishonor might have brought,  
And reared him in the Christian's hope and trust.  
The boy to manhood grown became a light  
To many souls and preached to human need  
The wondrous love of the Omnipotent.  
The work has multiplied like stars at night  
When darkness deepens; every noble deed  
Lasts longer than a granite monument."\*

—*Sarah Knowles Bolton.*

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## CHAPTER III

### HOW MAY I KNOW GOD'S PLAN?

It is a safe inference that your work ought to afford you a reasonable *financial return*. This matter is mentioned first not because it is of first importance, for almost any life work will afford a reasonable support. In fact, the problem of making a living in modern times is no problem at all to the average young person who views life rightly. And yet this consideration is proper. It is mentioned first here because it is first in the thinking of so many people. Then by mentioning it first we get it out of the way for considering things more complex.

It is safe to assume that your work in life should afford you an *opportunity to grow*. Nothing can be of greater importance to you in your personal life than this, for life's first business is to develop character in the divine image. Toil that gives little room for the exercise of life's nobler power, toil that leaves little room for leisure in the days and that is so strenuous as to leave no strength or ambition to use the meager hours of leisure that are left—such toil surely is unsuited to the young person who aspires. Your life work

should call out and exercise your own best powers. Then you can grow. Then it will not be a dull grind of drudgery that kills even the leisure hours, but an inspiring challenge that fills all of life with meaning.

Your life work should *employ your best powers*. In the country churchyard sleep "mute Miltons, ignoble Cromwells" and their like, but God never meant it so. The tragedy of life is that men with power to have blessed the world have often found no chance to employ such powers but have wasted their lives on tasks that could have been done by machines. Think what the world would have lost if Luther Burbank had been content to be nothing more than an ordinary gardener. What if Thomas Edison had remained a telegraph operator, never seeking opportunity for the employment of the strange powers with which he was endowed!

Viewing life either in terms of your contribution to human good or in terms of your own opportunity for growth, your life work should employ the highest powers given you.

Then, of course, your life work ought to enable you to render the *largest service to humanity*. "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (Mark 10. 45). And the Master's motive is the master motive for us. How can we be most useful? How can we be most helpful? If the right



answer can be found for this question, and life work is decided on that basis, it is certain that the other considerations will take care of themselves. Therefore this must be thought through with greatest care.

We could answer without hesitating if we could know all about our abilities and resources, and all about our circumstances and the human needs about us. These are the two factors in the solution of the problem of finding our place of largest helpfulness. If one could be sure that he has rightly measured his own abilities and that he has rightly measured the human needs his abilities could supply, he would have little difficulty in deciding what his life work ought to be.

God gives the poet the ability to see truths that are beautiful and to clothe them with words woven into beautiful garments of speech. God gives to the preacher the ability to understand spiritual needs and to lead men to Christ and the Christian life. He gives to the artisan his skill. He gives to the farmer his insight into the secrets of things that grow.

The man who understands his own abilities has made much progress in determining what God would have him be; for God's endowments are for the doing of God's will.

A rather strange hint of one's abilities is sometimes seen in childhood's play. One the-

ory of play is that it is a foreshadowing of manhood's abilities. The boy plays soldier because he has in him the latent fighting powers of the soldier. These powers may not find expression in later life, but they are there, and because of this fact the boy plays soldier.

On this theory one hearing Henry Clay in his boyhood orating to the cows on his father's farm should have known that he had abilities for public life.

Years ago in a little Ohio town a ten-year-old boy put up his sign, "Climax Distributing Agency," and tried to go into the advertising business. Today he is advertising manager for a big Eastern manufacturing concern. Years ago a little boy in Kansas used to preach to his play blocks and urge them to come forward to the altar. Later he preached to the trees and the horses. It was his play in childhood. Today he is one of the most prominent ministers in his native State. Of course too much must not be made of the possibilities of this theory. But it may furnish a hint as to latent abilities.

*But at best self-appraisal is difficult.* A difficulty arises from the fact that often a young man's abilities are unsuspected even by himself. His abilities cannot be measured until his possibilities are brought out. Saint Paul tells the young man Timothy to "stir up the gift that is within thee" (2 Timothy 1.6).

Here we touch the matter of education. Education enables the young man to find himself. It awakens his powers. It develops these powers. At the same time it gives him a large understanding of human needs and of the opportunities for service. If one's calling is not clear, the uncertainty usually vanishes if he goes forward in his educational plans.

Another difficulty in the way of a right appraisal of one's own abilities arises from the fact that men are usually poor judges of themselves, and that fact will lead a wise young man to hold his own conclusions about himself with some uncertainty.

It will be remembered that Moses thought that Aaron was better qualified to save Israel from the Egyptian bondage than he himself. When the angel of the Lord hailed Gideon as a mighty man of valor Gideon thought of himself as least in his father's house. Saint Paul called himself less than the least of all the saints, but God called him a chosen vessel and commissioned him for tasks of inconceivable greatness. But the important point here is merely that men are usually not good judges of themselves. Aid is needed in the appraisal of our abilities.

*Consult one or two wise and mature friends.* Often others can measure us better than we can measure ourselves. Happy is the young man who has a wise friend or two. Perhaps it

is father or the pastor or the Sunday-school teacher. If you have one or two friends in whose judgment you have confidence, lay the whole matter before them for their counsel. Of course you can't leave the matter to their decision. You will have to make the decision; but you will surely get help on this plan.

*Consult Christ.* Then there is a still more important step than that of seeking human counsel. This is one of the big questions of life that ought not to be answered without prayer. Paul's prayer, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" still finds answer. True, the answer does not usually come in such startling fashion; but by the quickening of our minds we get clear vision through prayer. Even when we are weak he can make us strong; where we lack he can supply. Whatever he wants us to do, we can do by his help.

*Then consider your circumstances.* In order to know where one's life will be most useful the human needs about us must be considered. That is just another way of saying that one must take into account the work at hand that God most needs to get done.

We assume that those who are to follow the commonplace tasks in a commonplace way will not be studying a book on how to find your life work. The fact that you are making this study marks you as out of the ordinary, and



suggests that perhaps you can qualify for leadership.

Long ago Christ was moved with compassion when he beheld the multitudes because they were as sheep *without a shepherd*. His heart was touched, not because they were so wicked nor because they were so foolish. It was not that they were as sheep, but that they were as sheep not having a shepherd. It was the lack of proper leadership that moved his heart.

This is not strange. Every movement for human good has had to wait till it could find expression in worthy leadership before it could become effective. Martin Luther is the explanation of the rise of Protestantism. The evangelical revival that gave Methodism to the world is explained when you understand John Wesley. Noble institutions are usually the lengthened shadows of their founders. They mark the advances that became possible when worthy leadership arose.

When early Christianity faced the system of Greek civilization restatements became imperative. Here was a great body of truth that had developed in Greek philosophy. Here were established habits of thinking. On the other hand, the heralds of the new faith brought new truths of infinite value. But the two bodies of truth did not seem to fit together. Saint Paul saw the necessity for

readjustments in the current interpretation of Christianity. He saw that the nonessentials of Mosaic ceremonialism would have to be abandoned. But there were others who feared that, if the old Hebrew ceremonials of the Old Testament were to be abandoned, it would be hard to tell where to stop. If people do not need to keep the feasts and fasts and other ceremonies ordered in Old Testament, they may not keep the Ten Commandments. Who is to say what is essential and what nonessential? These were real problems. But finally there was a harmonizing of the truths of Christianity and the truth of Greek philosophy, and Christianity went forward in world-conquest.

In the days of the Renaissance new learning opened a new universe to the knowledge of man. Copernicus and Galileo discovered that the earth was a sphere and revolved around the sun. A whole group of other important discoveries marked the period. It was the era of bold mariners like Columbus, who brought new continents into the range of human knowledge. The newly invented printing press made the new knowledge almost universal.

But the new knowledge did not seem to fit the ancient faith. Didn't the Bible say that the sun went around the earth? At any rate it spoke of the four corners of the earth, and so there were many who were troubled. It

was clear that if these new teachings were true, Christianity could not progress far in opposition to truth. Therefore these men must be wrong, and so an effort was made to have them recant. Everybody now knows that that effort is a dark page in the history of the Christian Church.

Then arose a few leaders who were able to distinguish between the essential in Christianity and the incidental. The real truths of religion and of the new learning were brought into alliance. Christianity was not destroyed by the new truth but profited by it very greatly. The Protestant Reformation was born, and so was the counter reformation in the Roman Catholic Church. This new adjustment opened the way for Christianity's conquests in the modern world.

*Consider the scientific age.* Now we have come to a new age of scientific thought. Astronomy with modern appliances has brought to human knowledge a universe vast beyond the power of all human imagination to grasp. Modern geology and anthropology and chemistry and biology and psychology have revolutionized earlier thought.

There are plenty of people who tell us that the new learning and the ancient faiths are antagonistic. There are those on the one hand who say, "I am a scientific man and since the teachings of science and the teachings of

historic faith do not harmonize, I will have no more to do with the ancient faith." On the other hand are those who say, "I am true to the ancient faith; and since modern science and the ancient faith do not seem to agree, I will denounce without investigation all teaching that does not accord with my interpretations of the ancient faith." Here is the great modern problem. All truth is from the mind of God, and it is futile to fight against God.

But how do the findings of modern science harmonize with the ancient faith? How does Christianity itself meet the tests of scientific methods of study? Can we have religious leaders with the scientific spirit and scientists with the religious spirit? Can we raise up a leadership who will align the truths of Christianity with those of scientific thought so as to give religion the vast advantage of the cooperation and support of modern scientific thinking?

Modern science has been applied to industry with amazing results. It has produced marvelous inventions. It has made conquest of vast natural forces. One result has been the increase of manufacturing; and because of this great cities have arisen. Industry has become concentrated and has grown marvelously complex.



A result of the new conditions under which the majority of the people now live is new sociological problems. Wealth and poverty exist side by side. Millions for their daily bread are dependent upon human forces that they cannot control. Poverty, crime, human exploitation, disease—a thousand problems of human comfort and human relations—present themselves. Modern science applied to industry can make these problems, but without religion it can never answer them.

But if a leadership can be produced that can bring into one great force all that is true in science and religion, that leadership will bring all the achievements of the scientific age to the promotion of human good. Science will not be prostituted to the work of increasing the horrors of war. Christianity will advance mightily in its program of establishing a brotherhood of man.

It is clear that men who have a worthy part in such an epoch of readjustment must be big enough to appreciate all modern learning and must be securely established in the essentials of religion.

Who is sufficient for leadership at such a time? God is saying, "Who will go for us? and whom shall we send?" What an opportunity for Christian leadership in any calling! What a supreme opportunity in religious leadership!

Do you dare to say "Here am I; send me"?



## CHAPTER IV

### DECISION AND VERIFICATION

*Decision should be deliberate.* The great decisions of life ought not to be made hastily or without full consideration. Every factor bearing upon the decision ought to be given its proper consideration. Full time should be taken for a careful study of all the facts. Life's great decisions should not be merely yielding to the sway of an emotional storm; such decisions usually amount to but little when the emotional storm has passed.

On the other hand, promptness in decision is a habit of great importance. In the matter of obedience and loyalty to God it is imperative. Therefore in life work decision, whenever the path becomes clear, or to the extent that it does become clear, prompt decision is necessary.

Deliberate decision does not mean delayed decision. It does mean decision that rests upon intelligent study. It means putting the will behind a plan that has approved itself to the intellect.

*Decision hours are usually definite.* There are special occasions at which life's great issues stand out with unusual clearness and demand

attention with unusual urgency. There are occasions of high privilege when people are lifted up as on some mount of vision and are able to see clearer and farther than at ordinary times. In other days the camp meetings were such occasions for many people. In these days Epworth League institutes are such occasions. Multitudes of young people, turning aside from their usual routine and attending these institutes, find in them hours of far vision. In considering the great interests of the Kingdom, it is as though they walked amid the mountains of God and in the clearer atmosphere of high inspiration were able to see their own life plans more plainly.

The greatest decisions of life should be made in our noblest moods, and then, having set the seal of our will upon them, we should compel ourselves to live up to their standard even if dull days should come.

“Tasks in hours of insight willed  
Can be through hours of gloom fulfilled.”

—*Matthew Arnold.*

If a man cannot decide rightly in the hours of exaltation, how can he do so in the days of weariness? If one cannot see the path of his life from the vantage ground of some mountain-top experience, how will he be able to see it from the lower levels of daily toil? The experience of the Transfiguration Mount only

came once in the lives of Peter and James and John, but they never forgot it.

Has God given you a Transfiguration-Mount experience? Have you ever felt that heaven was near and that God was speaking and that your own soul was triumphant over the material considerations that control so much of life? Have you come to some new appreciation of your own divine sonship and looked at life—your life—in its relations to eternity? Such experiences are golden hours for the registering of decisions and the setting of standards.

*Life work decisions should be tentative; they should be subject to revision in the light of any new indications of God's will.* A common error among young people is that of supposing that a life work decision is irrevocable even when found to have been unwisely made. One result of this error is that some young people fail to come to prompt decisions even when the path is plain. The step seems never capable of being reviewed. Their favorite text is that about putting one's hand to the plow and looking backward, and so they do not use the plow at all. Another result of the error of considering life-decisions irrevocable is that some who have decided unwisely feel that they have signed their lives away and cannot reconsider.

But all life work decisions should be held subject to reconsideration in event of new light coming. Your powers are expanding. What seemed most important yesterday with the powers that developed may not be most important to-morrow in the light of new talents found in the unfolding of your life. Or you may find limitations not known yesterday, and these may require a change of plan in loyalty to God.

Then conditions change, and changing conditions sometimes bring new light. A young man thought that he ought to be a professional violinist. In an accident he broke his arm and as a result his elbow became stiff. He became a missionary. Another young man wanted to be a missionary, but the death of his father left upon him the responsibility of caring for mother and the younger brothers and sisters, and necessitated a reconsideration of his life plans.

Perhaps this is just another way of saying that life work decisions should be held subject to change in response to events that come in God's providence. Indeed, one of the ways by which God guides us is by the doors that open and the doors that shut. A young man wanted to be a preacher, but for him that door closed, and a door opened by which he became an engineer. Afterward he was able to help two younger brothers prepare for the

ministry. By that plan God got two preachers instead of one. Abraham Lincoln set out to be a country storekeeper, but God closed that door and opened before him the doors of the White House.

Set your heart upon the work by which your life would seem to accomplish most for God. Do not be too easily discouraged. But if the doors of opportunity close before you and another path of usefulness opens, do not hesitate to enter it. This is the usual method of providential guidance.

Then life plans should be held subject to change in the testing of experience. If your try-out shows that you have not found the field in which your life can come to its best, do not hesitate to change. Why spoil your whole life over it? If you have become a minister and find that your work is not successful, but that you could be a successful evangelist, why not change? If you set out to be a teacher and find out by experience that you could do more good as a doctor, why not get into the new work as quickly as possible? A young man goes to India as a foreign missionary. He wants to give his life to that wonderful land, but his health fails. Clearly his plans should be changed.

Of course the changes to be made in the light of the test of usefulness ought to come early in the try-out of our life plans. The



Methodist Church receives young men into the ministry *on trial*. The plan could be followed with advantage in many vocations. By carefully appraising the try-out many of the tragic misfits could be avoided.

A special word should be considered by young women. We have come to a day when many careers of opportunity are open to women, and nowhere are women's finer sensibilities a greater advantage than in religious work. Woman's part in the advance of the Kingdom is one of the brightest chapters in the history of modern Christian achievement. And now as never before young women are deciding for fields of Christian service. But it should always be kept in mind that the most beautiful and most sacred calling is that of the home. To be queen in a Christian home is the highest calling of womanhood. Therefore, should one come into your life who is worthy of your life, all other plans properly may change in order that you may take up this holy work and establish another bit of heaven on earth by presiding in a Christian home.

But maybe you didn't need that bit of counsel; you'll do it anyway.

## CHAPTER V

### THE NEXT STEPS AFTER LIFE WORK DECISIONS

ALMOST every worthy life work decision requires that readjustments be made if it is to be effective. The new purpose has to be fitted into the old circumstances and habits and plans. This cannot be done without changing them. But these readjustments are usually difficult. The steps that immediately follow the adoption of life work goals are therefore of the utmost importance. They involve sore trial for many young people. They are beset with discouragements.

An understanding of these difficulties in advance of meeting them will help. It will be of advantage just to know where to turn for a friendly word of counsel when beset by the difficulties. This chapter is written to serve such purposes. It is placed here in the hope of reducing the deathrate of noble life-purposes.

We have seen that it is wise to make life decisions in the hours of our loftiest spiritual experiences—that such decisions should be made when we are at our best. From the lookout of some mountain top of high spir-

itual privilege it is easiest to get far visions and to gauge the direction which life should take.

One of the first discouragements commonly following such decisions grows out of the fact that we cannot stay on the mountain heights. Periods of lofty exaltation are commonly followed by reactions. Beyond the mountain there is a valley. Beyond the spiritual exaltation frequently lies spiritual depression. People are so constructed that it is impossible for them to sustain an experience of exalted spiritual ecstasy.

The decisions which looked so clear from the mountain top may look very different in the dull days, the monotonous days, and, it may be, the depressing days that follow. Then it is easy to question the reality of the vision and the decision.

Peter probably said to James and John: "Did we really see him transfigured on the mountain? Did we really see Moses and Elijah from the other world? Did they really talk about Calvary and its meaning? Or was it all our dream? It seemed so easy there to accept the way of the cross. But somehow things look different now that the night of glory is gone and we face the hard facts of everyday life. I wonder whether it was just a dream." At any rate, thousands of young people who have seen Christ glorified and have

seen him beckoning to them at some Epworth League Institute or at some life-service conference pass through such a period of misgiving. They go back home to everyday work; spiritual reaction comes. The vision seems far away and dreamlike. "After all now, was I warranted in making that decision? Wasn't it a bit hasty at any rate?" This is a very common experience.

But we have seen that the wise course in life is to set our standards in our lofty moments and then to hold ourselves to these standards when the inspiring hours are gone. Little progress is made as long as we continue the habit of fighting the same battles over and over. Do not let your scattered doubts gather and attack you again. In the hour when you are tempted to reconsider your decision, ask yourself whether you seem nearer to Christ than in the hour when you made the decision. Refuse to reconsider if you do not. God's warriors will be as really brave and faithful on the lowlands as on the mountains.

Another difficulty frequently met in this period is that of parental opposition. This is a real difficulty for some young people. Often, however, it is a difficulty only in the mind of a young person.

A young man whose father was a business man of large interests and of some wealth came home from college. A great purpose

was in his heart. But he hesitated to tell father and mother. He thought that God wanted him for the gospel ministry; but what would father say? Father had looked forward to the day when his big boy would share with him the business responsibilities. Then later the business affairs would pass into the hands of the son. This was the father's plan. What would he say when he found that all this was to be changed? What would mother say when she found that his home was not to be beside their house but off at some distant church, perhaps very far away? His mind was greatly troubled. He knew his father's plans; and he also knew his heavenly Father's plans. And the two didn't fit together. With a woman's intuition mother saw that his mind was troubled. She asked the reason.

"God wants my life for the ministry, and I must obey him."

"Have you settled it with him?"

"Yes."

Then a far-away look came to mother's eyes, and maybe some proud glad tears, as she said, "I thank God." And a quiet smile came over father's face, for that father is a very practical man, and he said: "We have no plans that can stand before God's plans. Boy, I'll back you to the limit. You'll start for theological school in September." Instead of



the dreaded opposition he found inspiring help. It is usually so.

A young woman gave her life to God for the foreign mission field. Her situation was most unusual. Her only sister had gone as a missionary and had contracted an illness from which she died. There was the unfinished work of her sister, and God was calling, and helpless needy ones over there were calling. She heard the calling and answered "Yes" to God. But at home was mother—just mother and herself, that was all. And mother had already sacrificed so much. Mother would be so lonely. There would be no one left to comfort her or to care for her. It was not too hard to make her own sacrifice; but how could she ask mother to sacrifice any more? And yet she must not be disobedient to the heavenly vision. She shrank from announcing her decision to mother. How mother would plead with heart-breaking objections. But she went straight to the task from which she shrank. She told mother all about it. To her surprise, mother had no objections at all. Mother's face glowed with holy joy. Mother's heart was full of thanks to God. Mother's blessing was upon her. And watching angels caught the thrill for new hallelujahs.

Yet there are those who will meet parental objection when noble life-decisions have been made. This fact creates a very great dif-

ficulty. What if it should be so with you? Of course we must obey God rather than man. But how shall such a situation be met?

You must have patience. You must be kind. In quietness and sweetness and prayer you must demonstrate that your decision is a decision and not merely a passing impulse. As you do that, and as you go forward one step after another in working toward your life work, opposition will yield and your way will open before you.

Still another embarrassment grows out of early companionships. A great life-decision has its bearings here. It may meet ridicule. It may be misunderstood. In its very nature it separates you from others. Those whose chief aim in life is pleasure will misjudge you because they cannot understand. Those who themselves are controlled by selfish purposes can scarcely believe that your chief motives are loyalty and service. To them it looks foolish. They may bluntly say so. There have always been those to whom the gospel of Christ was foolishness.

The acceptance of any divine call marks the beginning of a life apart from others. True, it means holier friendships with the few and holier associations with Jesus; but it means separation from the crowd. Sometimes it means learning to walk alone with God. Very well, let it mean that for you if necessary.

All the difficulties of readjustment attending dedication to worthy life work can be met successfully if attention is given to a few clear facts. In addition to what has already been suggested and yet involved in it are two advices worthy of specific mention.

Keep strengthening your own soul-life. Your safety is not in your ability to dodge difficulties but in having the strength to meet your difficulties and overcome them. Therefore nurture your soul to abounding strength through devotional habits. You feed your body three times a day; why let your soul starve? You have established habits of feeding your body; why not be equally regular in habits of feeding your soul? Of course you will lose the sound of God's call to you if you let a thousand clamoring voices of earth come between you and him. Feed on the Word of God. Practice a life of prayer. Know the great hymns of the church. Observe all the "means of grace." Get into the work of God right where you are, and exercise your spiritual muscles till you can say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."

The second special advice is that you guard against being turned aside into any bypath.

When Christ steadfastly set his face to go up to Jerusalem there was much that he had to leave behind. Behind him were Galilee and the scenes of his childhood. There he had

played among the lilies of the field. There he had observed the sparrow's fall. Behind him were his mother and his brethren. Behind him were the places of his greatest popularity. But he had steadfastly set his face to go up to Jerusalem.

Then this great purpose necessitated that many things be passed by as he moved to the goal of his life.

"Master, here is Samaria and Jacob's well. What would be the harm of turning aside?"

"These are not on the path that leads to my life-goal."

"Master, here are the splashing, laughing waters of Jordan that have come from your own loved Galilee. Couldn't we turn aside to listen to the singing of the waters? Where would be the harm in that?"

"Behold, I go to Jerusalem. Nothing shall turn me aside one step."

How many things are left aside and passed by when one steadfastly sets his face to go to his life-goal! How many questions take care of themselves! Doubtful indulgences, even when innocent bypaths are spurned. He doesn't even have to argue whether some things are wrong in themselves; he has no use for them and no time for them if they do not help him reach his goal.

How much Jerusalem meant to the Master! There is a real sense in which he had always

been going directly toward it. On the map of Palestine his journeys seem to zigzag; but on the map of God's will it shows one straight march to the goal.

"But, Master, at Jerusalem is a garden of sorrows, and Pilate's hall, and Golgotha, and a cross! Do you see what Jerusalem means?"

"Yes, I see all that, but I also see an altar for the sins of the world, and a light for all the coming ages, and an everlasting redemption. I go to the cross. I go to the cross."

What if he had failed to go to Jerusalem for us? Yes, and what if we should fail to reach the goal of our life for him?



## CHAPTER VI

### WORKING TOWARD YOUR LIFE WORK

WHETHER you see clearly the life work which should be yours or not, it is safe to say that you will be moving in the direction of it if you are careful to take up the duty that is nearest to you. A very common danger is that of indulging in high purposes that are all to be fulfilled at some distant date, and then permitting to-day's duties to pass by unnoticed. That attitude almost always means death to the high purpose.

On some occasion of high privilege a young man decides that his life ought to be given to the Christian ministry. But his purpose is for the far future. He knows that he must secure a proper education for this work. He is aware that a call to any life work is first of all a call to get ready for that life work. But he delays. He tells himself that he can't go to college just now. He hasn't the money. Oh, yes, he knows that others have found a way or made it, but he puts the matter off. He knows that his pastor has books that would be helpful and that he could borrow. He could be making progress toward his goal

every day, but he doesn't get to it. He neglects the opportunity to study.

Then, there are so many opportunities for moving toward his goal in Christian service. Someone ought to organize the Boy Scouts in his community. The Epworth League needs the help he could give. There is work to be done in the Sunday school. There are opportunities all about him if he will only open his eyes and see. But he just lets them pass by while he cherishes his hopes of great things to be done in some uncertain future, instead of devoting himself to them with the same spirit which he hopes to put into future efforts. If he were to serve God in the present even in small opportunities, he would find himself moving toward his great goal. Through faithfulness in that which is least he would come to mastery over great things; but by neglect of the duties of the present the fine aspirations for the future fade away.

When Martin Luther set himself to the task of translating the Bible he was beset by a multitude of other tasks. He succeeded, however, because he adopted as his plan, "No day without a verse," and that kept him at the great task of translation. Some step toward the goal every day is the only safe plan for reaching the best in any life.

Perhaps a young man decides that he can serve best as a Christian business man. Here,

again, he knows that if God plans this for his life, he ought to get ready. He knows that for real leadership in business life he must have a thorough education. He expects to go to college and get ready, but he puts off the starting. He knows that he could easily be learning something every day, but it is such a bother. He is earning some money. He could save a little, but he spends it all. He doesn't know that the biggest dime in the world is the dime that measures the difference between five cents a day more than a man earns and five cents a day less than he earns. If he knew the value of that dime, he would at least be making some progress toward his goal. Then later he would progress faster, and after awhile he would arrive. But because he stands still while time does not, the young man never arrives.

Or it may be that he gives attention only to the material side of his goal. He knows that if God wants him to be a business man, he ought to be a Christian business man. He thinks of the honesty and good will that he will employ in that future work; he thinks of the liberality that he will show with his earnings when he comes to his goal. Now perhaps he begins the material preparation. He carefully saves a good part of his earnings. He studies business methods. He is completing high school. But while he dreams of the good

that he will do some day he lets to-day drift away. He has just as many opportunities to render helpful service as the fellow looking toward the ministry, but he lets them pass by. Every time he turns away from a chance to do good something happens to his finer self. The best that is in him starves. His holy dreams fade. If he ever comes to business power, it will be to a power that will be no more than the empty shell of what it might have been.

The only sure plan of realizing high ambitions is to make some advance toward them every day. Ambitions grow strong as we feed them. The progress made to-day makes tomorrow's progress easier.

If you have found what you believe to be God's plan for your life, or if you are sincerely seeking it, one of the first things to do is to go to work at once for God. Find something to do for him *now*. If you can only see the way to go forward a few steps, take those steps and expect the way to open as you advance. It is easy to guide the ship that is under full head of steam, but no man can guide the ship that is drifting. It is easy for God to guide you when you are doing your best; but even God can't guide the person who isn't going anywhere.

Second only in importance to the duty of finding work to do for God at once is the

duty of beginning to prepare for your life-task at once. By this as well as by Christian service some gain should be made every day. If you are in high school or college, you are making some gain in your preparation every day. If you are not in school, you have access to good books. You have friends who would very gladly advise you as to how to go forward. Do the thing that you can do now. Don't worry about what you cannot do, and be sure that you do not let it prevent you from making to-day's progress.

There is good psychology in the old Negro melody, "Keep Inchin' Along." It is easy for the fellow to be side-tracked who is not doing much of anything now but just waiting to do some great thing some day; but it is very hard to stop the person who has set his heart on making some gain toward his goal each day.

"Moment by moment  
Let down from heaven,  
Time, opportunity,  
Guidance are given.  
Fear not tomorrow,  
Child of the King;  
Trust it with Jesus,  
Do the next thing."\*

Or, as another of our poets has said:

"If God thou fearest,  
Rise up and do, thy whole life through,  
The duty that lies nearest."\*

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\*Quoted from *Poems with Power to Strengthen the Soul*—Mudge; published by the Methodist Book Concern.



## CHAPTER VII

### IF DISAPPOINTMENTS COME

OF the total number of young people who sincerely dedicate themselves to Christ for full-time religious life-service a large proportion fail to work out their own high purposes. Because of this fact some young people have hesitated to make worthy decisions, fearing that they too may fail. Others, reflecting upon the matter, question the wisdom or the sincerity of the unrealized decisions. Both of these positions are unwarranted.

A large number of the failures are due to the loss of high purposes in ways made clear elsewhere in this little book. The way to prevent such failure has already been explained.

But a considerable number of persons who enlist for definite forms of spiritual service find their way blocked by facts beyond their control. Such young people face the danger of serious disappointment.

A young woman of beautiful and self-forgetful spirit had given herself wholly to Christ and had set her heart upon going as a missionary to Java. She knew a returned missionary from that tropical island. From this friend she got all the information she could

get. She read all about Java. For a half dozen years she studied and thought and dreamed about Java. There her life would be spent for Jesus in service of benighted people for whom he died. Her college work was progressing nicely. Her heart was full of peace and holy joy as she went forward. All went well in her plans until she had an interview with a representative of the foreign missionary board. Then the startling fact came out that she could never be sent to Java. Her eyes were somewhat impaired. The glare of the tropical sun would have made her wholly blind. No missionary board would think of sending her to Java.

Only the finest type of young people will understand the bitterness of her disappointment. She will never see the luxuriant tropic beauty of her beloved Java. She will never have the privilege of bearing the hardships and meeting the lurking dangers for Jesus. Only in her dreams will she hear the haunting call of Java's lost ones to whom she hoped to minister.

Another young woman dedicated her life to missionary work in India. She studied India and talked India and prayed India all through her college course. When her preparation was complete she was accepted by the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society and sent to India. Within a short time her health broke. She

was sent into the mountains to recuperate. Later she tried to resume her work, but very soon her health began to fail again. It became apparent that she could not live in India. She had to forego her noble ambition and return to America.

A young man dedicated himself to the work of the Christian ministry. For years he dreamed of this holy work. He would baptize cooing infants in the name of the Babe of Bethlehem. He would guide the feet of childhood into the King's highway. He would unite fond lovers in holy marriage. He would bring the cheer and strength of the skies to toiling manhood and womanhood. He would comfort the sorrowing with hopes reaching into eternity. The aged should lean on his arm as they walked into the valley and shadow of death. He would be a faithful minister of the gospel of Christ.

All this was his dream and his plan and his purpose. He knew that he must get ready. He must go through high school and college. But father was dead, and he as the oldest boy was responsible for mother and the younger children. That responsibility drove him to work with all his strength. He saw other boys pass through the high school as one year after another held him to his toiling. He saw some of them go through college. Slowly the cold truth forced itself upon him that the days of prep-

aration were gone and that it was too late. The golden dream could never be anything more than a dream.

These cases are not isolated; they are typical and could be indefinitely multiplied by anyone who is interested in helping young folks find their life work. Many young people who have held fast to holy ambitions have come to know bitter disappointment. What should be the attitude if disappointments come?

First, let such a person remember that his dedication fundamentally was a dedication to the will of God. It was a dedication to Christ much more than a dedication to some chosen field of service. It was a dedication to some definite field of service only because this seemed to include the will of God for his life. If further light should show that his will is to be fulfilled in some other field, loyalty to the consecration should lead to change of plans and to equal faithfulness wherever he may lead.

We do not say that we should never feel disappointed. There was disappointment in the tears of Jesus as he wept over Jerusalem. One who dares to hold vast plans for service runs the risk of meeting vast failures. But that is no argument against worth-while purposes in life. If our lives are hid with Christ in God, whatever failures may come and what-

ever disappointments, whatever new paths our lives may take, we will find that our work is an effective part of the divine plan of lifting the children of earth up into the estate of the sons of God.

Disappointments are like the ancient symbol of God's presence. They are a pillar of cloud and darkness to Egyptians but a pillar of fire and light to children of God. Disappointments seen from the wrong side bring darkness and confusion. But rightly viewed they light new paths. And all the enthusiasm and devotion and loyalty of our earlier purposes should go with us into the new paths. We should thank God that we saw some vision splendid and that our wills responded loyally to it; for, even if the plans of life must change, the glory of the high purposes which held our hearts will leave us something of beauty and worth. If we have dreamed high dreams and tried to keep step with God, it never has been a vain and empty experience. On the contrary, there is very great value in unrealized ambitions.

David wanted to build the temple at Jerusalem. God told him that he could not do this. But God also told him that he did well to have it in his heart to build the temple. Having the great purpose in his heart meant disappointment; but it meant much more.



Dreams and struggles make life worth while; yes, even give it a worth that brings pleasure to God.

Once a certain minister had a flower garden. He did not know much about pansies, but a florist told him that when the plants put forth their beautiful flowers they are trying to make seed; and that when the flower makes seed, its work is done and it ceases to bloom. Almost every day after that the minister went to the pansy bed and talked to the plants as he cut off their flowers. He would say: "Little pansies, you are not to realize your purpose this time. I know you want to make seed; but your effort, your flower, brings pleasure to me. I am sorry to disappoint you; but try again. You can do better I know." Then the pansies tried again and again. They put forth great beautiful flowers that were the wonder of the neighbors. They grew greater and more beautiful by their efforts to overcome their disappointments. All the long summer they bloomed and brought joy to the heart of their master. And all of this is a parable if you want to think it through.

We were considering David's great ambition and his great disappointment. We need to remember that, while David did not realize his great ambition, because of it he did realize vastly more important things. It was his Temple dream that inspired him to write

psalms. They were for use in that Temple. He did not get to build the Temple; but he wrote the Temple songs, and a single one of them surpasses the worth of any Temple that this world ever saw. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pasture. He leadeth me beside the still water. He restoreth my soul." This shepherd psalm has come down through the centuries like a ministering angel, charming care from the weary hearts of men. It has run out to the ends of the world. It will be sung while time lasts. Perhaps in the eternal world we shall still sing "The Lord is my shepherd." David, you didn't build the Temple but you did a vastly greater thing.

What we are saying is just this. When folks hold fast to holy ambitions even in spite of disappointments, they get done the best things their lives are capable of accomplishing; and frequently God's realizations through our lives are bigger than our dreams.

"So do I gather strength and hope anew;  
For well I know thy patient love perceives  
Not what I did, but what I strove to do,  
And though the full ripe ears be sadly few  
Thou wilt accept my sheaves."

—*Elizabeth Akers.*

## CHAPTER VIII

### VOCATIONS AND AVOCATIONS

YOUR vocation is your calling. It is your life work in the sense in which we have been using that expression. Your avocation is a kind of secondary calling. It is your chief life interest apart from your vocation. William Smith is a business man; that is his vocation. But he is superintendent of his Sunday school; he gives a vast amount of thought and time to this work; its claim upon his time is second only to that of his life work. It is his avocation. Mrs. Balch is a homemaker; that is her vocation; and if you want to know how well she does it, you ought to be a guest at her home. But Mrs. Balch is president of the Ladies' Aid Society; that is her avocation, and she takes into this work her usual enthusiasm and efficiency. When you talk to her, you find her as really interested in her avocation as in her vocation. Naturally, Mr. Balch may think her vocation more important; but the pastor of her church can hardly see how her vocation can be more important than her avocation.

Your avocation is the work in which you are chiefly interested apart from the occupation

by which you earn your support. Now, closely related to the vastly important matter of finding God's will for your vocation, is that of finding his will for your avocation, for his will includes your whole life.

Avocation sometimes molds and colors a life even more than vocation. The hours spent at the bench or at the desk or elsewhere in the daily toil become a routine. Sometimes they seem to be directed by necessity. The hours spent in our avocation are purely voluntary; they represent the investment of our leisure. They therefore more freely represent us. And just because they sometimes afford fuller opportunity for self-expression, they sometimes have the larger influence in the enrichment of our own lives. One writer, observing this fact, has said, "Tell me what you do when you have nothing to do, and I will tell you what you are." He was correct, and it would be still easier to tell what we will be in soul-worth to-morrow on the basis of our use of leisure to-day.

When the strain of toil relaxes, which way does your mind turn? Jack Wilson is a carpenter; that is his trade. But he "follows the ponies"; that is his hobby. He has a day off. He spends it at the races. He has an hour off. He reads the race-track news. Sunday comes but he doesn't think of church. He spends it figuring out how to pick the win-

ners. Now you know just how big a man Jack is—or how little a man; and you know what his spiritual measurements are likely to be in the future.

Beside Jack in the carpenter shop works Andy Scott. Andy has his hobby too. It is the church music. We may call that an avocation. He is the life of the choir in the little church. He sees that others don't forget. He himself is always at choir practice. He is familiar with the great hymns of the church. He has a day off. He spends it trying to select anthems really great and yet within the range of the ability of the volunteer choir. If his work at the bench is not crowding his mind, he is humming some sacred strain. Now you know what kind of a man Andy Scott is, for you know his avocation. You know that his children will run to meet him when he comes home. You know that his dog isn't afraid of him. You know that people are sure with affection to call him "Uncle Andy." You know that his friends honor him. The minister preaches better when "Mr. Andrew Scott" leads the singing. He reminds people of that other singing Carpenter, the one who sang a hymn before going out to die on a cross.

It frequently happens that a man's avocation counts more for human welfare than his vocation. The occupation or profession of



some men is mainly the means of earning a livelihood, while the avocation represents the noblest self-expression in service for God. A shoemaker once said that his business was to serve God and that he mended shoes in order to pay expenses. Paul was a tent-maker by trade. He became an apostle by avocation. It may be that the writing of his letters was but a secondary matter in his thought. But certainly in uplift for the world his letter-writing was infinitely more important than his tent-making. John Bunyan was a preacher of the gospel. But they locked him up in Bedford jail. He had to keep his mind occupied. He wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*. He doubted whether it would amount to much in help for others; the writing was an avocation. But the verdict of the world is that it far outranks the worth of his preaching ministry.

Speaking in college terms, we may think of our vocation as our major and our avocation as our first minor in the school of life. But Christ is to be the Lord and Master of all our life. Well, then, every argument that urges us to find God's will for our life as to its major will apply with equal force when we think of our minors.

If you come to see that God wants your life for some full-time religious life-service, you will, of course, select a minor in keeping

with your major. Your minor may be literature, or science, or flowers, or music—any wholesome hobby. But have a hobby. It should be enough different from your usual work to give you mental rest, and yet it should be related to your major. But if your major work of life is in the religious field, your minor almost certainly will adjust itself.

Much more, however, must be said if your major service is not in the religious field. If your prayerful consideration should lead you to the conclusion that God wants you to be a banker or a doctor or a school-teacher, or something else not definitely in the field of spiritual ministries, then it is of the utmost importance that you select as your avocation some interest that offers full opportunity for the exercise of your spiritual powers, and that offers also full opportunity for spiritual service for others. We have seen how such exercise of spiritual powers colors and glorifies life, and we have seen how vastly important such services for others can be.

Now, the great center for such avocational opportunities is the local church. Some opportunities are afforded by independent charities, Y.M.C.A., Y.W.C.A., and other organizations. Some people give a large share of their leisure time to purely personal unorganized service for others. It is almost impossible to continue the unorganized individual

efforts indefinitely. The single strand of thread that stands aloof from the other strands and tries to lift alone cannot accomplish much. Its influence is easily broken. But when it weaves itself with a hundred other strands it forms a rope that can lift a ton. Its strength is in organization. Life is like that. Individual effort is weak, while organized effort is mighty. Your efforts for helpfulness can be strengthened a hundredfold if organized in the Church of God. No other organization offers so wide a range of inviting opportunities for investment in service, and nowhere else will efforts accomplish so much.

Here is the Sunday school, the world's greatest opportunity for volunteer religious teaching. Here is the Epworth League—no greater opportunity in the world for the training of religious leadership. Here is the Official Board, and the Ladies' Aid Society, and the Woman's Home Missionary and the Woman's Foreign Missionary Societies, and a dozen other great organizations. Here a hundred great interests are focused—Christian education, Christian stewardship, evangelism, homes for our aged, the care of our veteran ministers, our deaconesses in their ministry to the lost, our hospitals in their service of healing for the poor. All these and scores of other interests center at your own local church.

You can invest your leisure time in any one of these. Learn all you can about it. Promote it in your own church. Serve men through it. Serve God through it. You can make your efforts mighty for good. You will share your church's world fellowship in service. Your life will be lifted to the dignity of divine sonship and glorified if you find your avocation centering in the house of God.

We have seen that it is not God's will that all lives be devoted to ministry as a vocation. God needs Christian business men and Christian lawyers and Christian home-makers and all the rest. God does not ask all to follow a religious vocation. But, surely, God does want all his children to help him establish the Kingdom of Righteousness in the world. If your vocation is not to be in the religious field, surely your avocation ought to be.

Your little local church reaches outward to the ends of the earth in its influence. Oh, yes, it does. And it reaches down as far as the depths of sin. It reaches onward into eternity in its results because it reaches upward to the throne of God for its inspiration, and backward to a cross for its power. If you want to help God set up a Kingdom of Righteousness on earth, the best place for you to invest your efforts is in the Church of God.

## CHAPTER IX

### FITTING INTO GOD'S WORLD PLANS

IF God has a plan for our lives, he must have a world plan into which these individual plans will fit. Some understanding of his world plans is necessary in order that we may have the zeal and enthusiasm that will make the plans for our individual lives really effective.

A great stone church was in process of erection. The architect had enlisted the services of an artist and a beautiful painting was made which showed the temple as it would appear when completed. The workmen who were doing the excavating were taken before this beautiful painting. They were told that they were not merely digging dirt; they were erecting a temple for God.

Later the masons began their work. Each man was doing the part assigned to him. The ~~hod~~ carriers were carrying the stone and mortar. But if each had worked alone, this work might easily have become a burden. Again and again these men were permitted to step into the chapel and view the temple they were building in order that each might see how his part fitted into the whole beautiful plan.



Then the carpenters came. The building took form. But some were working on the obscure parts while others erected the great timbers that supported the roof. Each found pleasure in the knowledge that he was contributing to the success of the whole plan.

Probably every man who worked in the building of that great church did better work because he could see what the whole plan was. Certainly, every man worked with greater pleasure and satisfaction.

It makes a very great difference whether a man is working eight hours a day for so much money or is working for the erecting of a beautiful temple for God. The one work is drudgery, the other is glorious. Yet the difference is not in the work but in the knowledge brought to the work.

In a former chapter in discussing the circumstances amid which our lives are set a very brief sketch was given of the problem of the new adjustment of Christianity and the new scientific learning. A review of those facts will throw a flood of light upon the world program of God's kingdom.

Attention is now called to the fact that new inventions and discoveries are making the world continually grow smaller. One hundred years ago New York and Philadelphia were two days apart by the fastest means of transportation; and because the stage made

that run of ninety miles in two days it was called the flying machine. Now the two cities are only two hours apart by railroad train or less than one hour by aeroplane.

One hundred years ago the court gossip of Europe was published in America three months after the events, and that was called news. The battle of New Orleans was fought after peace had been declared because there was no way to get the news that the war was over. Now we get all the important news of all the world every twenty-four hours. Now we listen in on musical concerts given in distant cities, and the ends of the earth are in the same little neighborhood. In fact, our world has become so close a neighborhood that we are compelled to learn to live together in the brotherhood of Christ or face ruin. A neighborhood world filled with hate and sin means world suicide. It is Christ or ruin for civilization now. Think it through.

But the world-neighborhood is the amazing opportunity of the ages for an aggressive and consecrated church. Here is the world opportunity. Whether your work be that of the teacher, or the preacher, or the doctor, or the missionary, or the Christian business man, or whatever it may be, and however conscientious and faithful you may be in it, it will take on a new dignity in your own eyes and you will find new joy in it if you can see it

as a part of God's great comprehensive plans for the world. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that you cultivate world vision.

World vision not only shows us how our own task fits into the temple of redeemed humanity, but it shows us how the tasks of others fit also, and therefore it shows us a new dignity in their toiling. In the erecting of the church referred to above the masons might have looked down upon the excavators. They were all grimed with dirt. Or the carpenters might have despised the work of the masons. But as they all looked repeatedly upon the picture of the completed structure, each saw how his own work was made perfect in the toil of his neighbor, and each saw the dignity of the other's toil. They were all workers together for God.

So in God's larger temple, world vision not only glorifies your own toil but shows the glory of the toil of others too. And out of this comes a feeling of comradeship and brotherhood toward all who are trying to establish good in the world. Such world-fellowships make for larger manhood and for more joyful and effective service.

Any effort to comprehend God's world plans in the present era must immediately lead to the understanding that the whole world is in his plan, and that now as possibly never before no man liveth unto himself and no nation

liveth unto itself. The barriers of hate and of national selfishness are being broken down. The effort to keep them up and to extend them almost wrecked civilization in the World War, and some of the shortsighted statesmen of the world find it hard to understand that progress for humanity by advance of conflicting national units is no longer possible.

The new age has drawn the world together and united it by so many ties that when one nation suffers the whole world feels the result. When one nation takes a backward step the advance of all humanity is retarded. In such an age the study of God's world-plans universalizes us, giving us the consciousness of being world citizens. That does not mean that we love our own land less, but it does mean that we come to have larger appreciation and sympathy of people of all other lands.

*This consciousness of world fellowship* is taking hold of hearts of the youth of all lands. The danger of future war is not in the attitude of the youth of the nations; it belongs to the generation that is passing away. The youth of many lands are united in beautiful expressions of friendship in our Epworth Leagues. The students of America are aiding the students of the stricken countries of Europe through the World Student Friendship Fund. The youth of the world are uniting for the prevention of future wars.



Wherever the local church may be located its boundaries will never again be township boundaries. For every modern preacher there is new meaning in Wesley's words, "The world is my parish." That is no longer a visionary possibility; it is an actual necessity, and the churches that are drying up and dying are those that are failing to appreciate their world-wide connections. The churches that are vigorous and triumphant are those that look upon God's whole great plan and see how their own faithfulness fits into it.

So with the individual member, whatever his life work may be, the full measure of his privileges and responsibilities requires that he keep himself informed of the progress of the kingdom of God in the world; and he can hardly hope to be broad enough in his sympathies to fulfill God's whole plan for his own life unless he keeps in open vision God's larger plans that are unfolding in the world.

In the new day of fuller realization of world fellowship the Christian business man will not count his earnings in the dollars he keeps so much as in those he invests for the building of the new civilization. Then the teacher, the doctor, the preacher, everyone having found the plan of God for his life, will find his life work glorified as he sees it forming a part of the world-inclusive plans of the Christ.

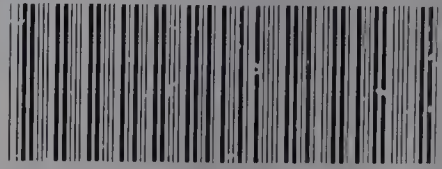


## A PRAYER .

O God, help me to see thy plan for my life, and to this end purify my heart and mind that in the clear air of purity I may see a plain path before me. Fill my heart with the Holy Spirit, that my will may be turned to ready obedience to thy call. Make me big enough to appreciate and enter into the world-plans of Jesus. Make me good enough to further those plans by all the issues of my life. May no littleness or narrowness or blindness in me make it impossible for my life to measure up to thy plan. In the consciousness that I am a son of God, and with the exhilaration of having a part in the building of a redeemed world, may I be a workman that needeth not to be ashamed. Amen.



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